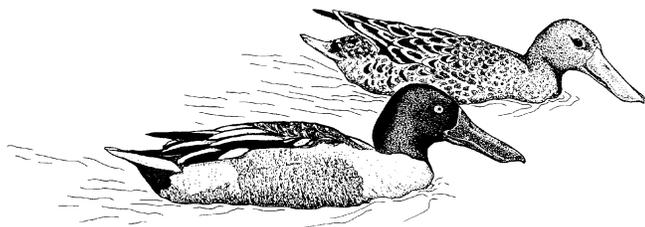


Planning Update 1

Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Greetings!

This is the first in a series of Planning Updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to keep you informed and involved in planning efforts for the Kern National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex.



Northern shovellers

This planning update provides a brief background of the Complex, describes the planning and public involvement process, and lets you know how you can become involved. We will be sending these planning updates periodically to local landowners, government agencies, private organizations, and others who express interest. You are invited to our first two public scoping meetings in Tulare on August 30 and Bakersfield on August 31. See the back page for more details.

Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The Kern NWR Complex is composed of three refuges: Kern, Pixley, and Blue Ridge. Kern NWR is located 19 miles west of Delano, California at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley. It was established in 1960 to provide wintering habitat for waterfowl in the southern San Joaquin Valley. The refuge consists of a single, 10,618-acre unit owned by the Service. Kern NWR's seasonal wetland, grassland,

alkali/scrub playa, and riparian plant communities support a diversity of wildlife.

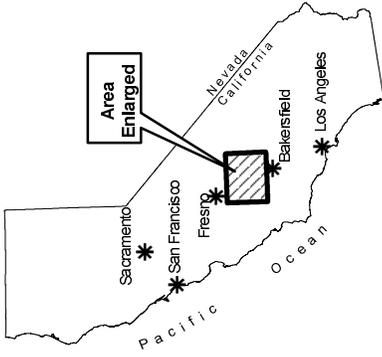
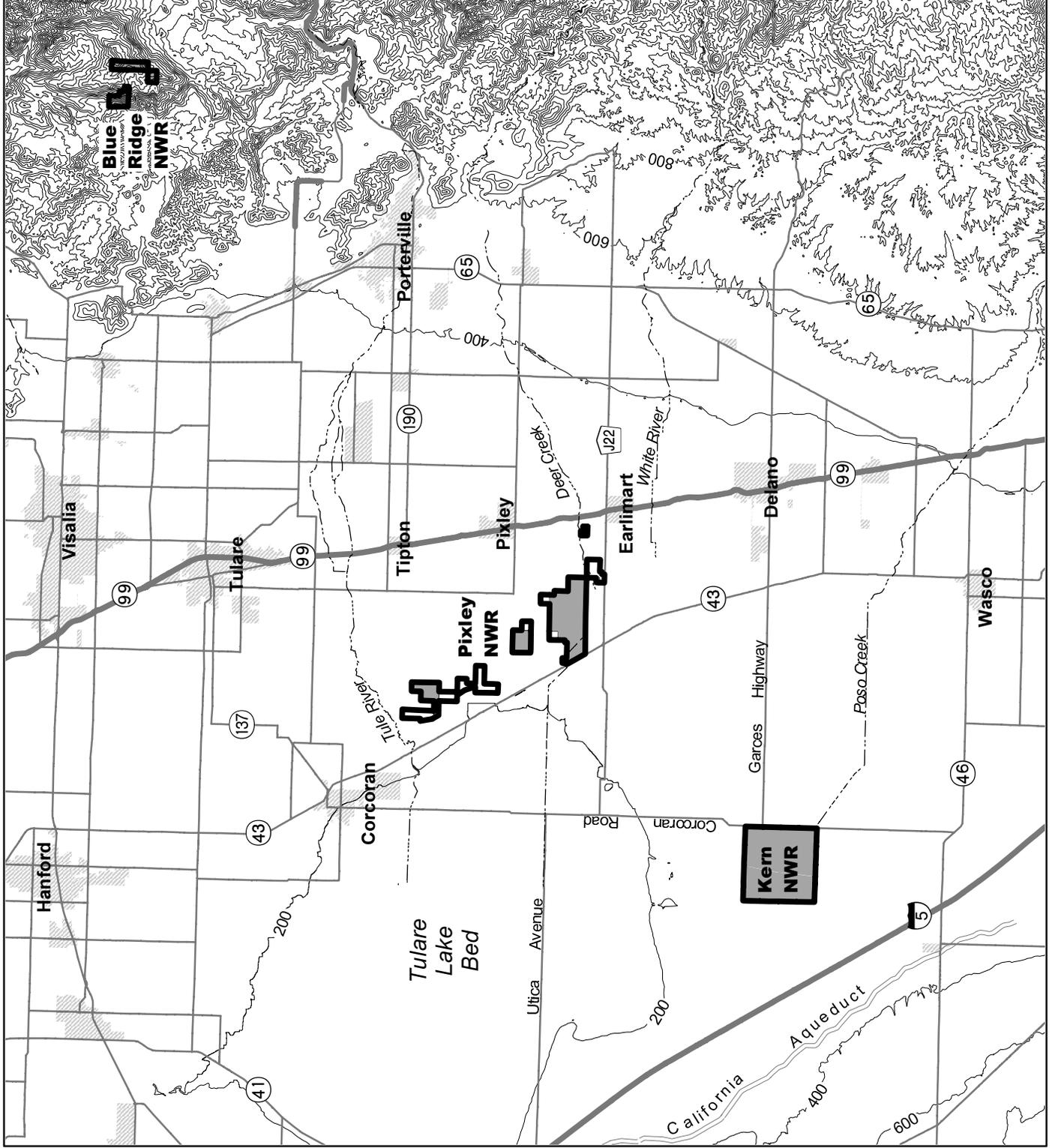
Pixley NWR is located approximately 19 miles south of Tulare, northeast of Kern NWR. This refuge was set aside in 1959 to provide wintering habitat for waterfowl. The refuge was later expanded to protect habitat for the endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The approved Pixley NWR boundary contains about 8,800 acres, of which about 70 percent is owned by the government. Vegetation types at Pixley NWR include marsh/seasonal wetland, alkali playa, grassland, saltbush scrub, and riparian.

Blue Ridge NWR is located in central Tulare County, northeast of Porterville, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. This refuge was established in 1982 to protect critical roosting habitat for the California condor. Blue Ridge NWR's 897 acres are all owned by the government. Vegetation types occurring at Blue Ridge NWR includes yellow pine forest, chaparral, foothill woodland, riparian, and meadow.

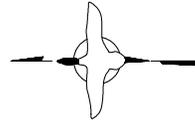
Contents

Greetings	1
Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex	1
Creating a Comprehensive Conservation Plan .	1
Existing Management Plans	2
Current Management	2
Interim Goals	2
Planning Issues	3
How You Can Help	3

STUDY AREA



-  Refuge Boundaries
- FWS Ownership**
-  Fee Title
-  Private Ownership
- Cities and Towns**
-  200-foot Contours
-  Streams and Rivers



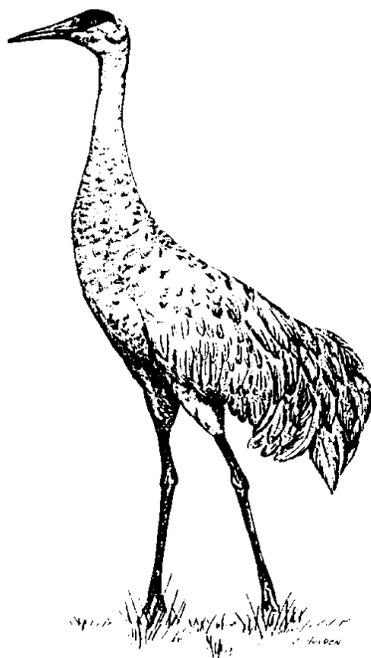
**Kern
National Wildlife Refuge
Complex**

Existing Management Plans

Current management of Kern and Pixley NWRs is guided by master plans which were implemented in 1986. Blue Ridge NWR, which is part of a larger 11,100-acre Blue Ridge Wildlife Habitat Area, is managed according to the multi-agency Blue Ridge Habitat Management Plan completed in 1986.

Both the Kern and Pixley master plans contain specific objectives for refuge management which step down from the broad National Wildlife Refuge System goals. These objectives are generally expressed in use-days for wildlife and number of visits for public use activities. In addition, the master plans list a number of specific strategies for achieving the objectives.

Many things have changed since the existing management plans for the three refuges were completed. For example, prior to 1993, Kern and Pixley NWRs had no reliable source of water. Wetland acreage varied directly with water availability and during drought years, the wetlands were completely dry. Since the passage and implementation of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, Kern and Pixley NWRs have more reliable deliveries of water. Another important change is the passage of the National Wildlife System Improvement Act and its mandates that the Refuge System be managed to ensure that its biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health are maintained and to facilitate compatible wildlife-dependant recreation.



Sandhill Crane

Current Management

Currently, habitat management at Kern and Pixley NWRs focuses on two areas: (1) manipulation of water levels and vegetation in wetlands to provide wintering habitat for waterbirds; and (2), livestock grazing to reduce non-native grass cover in uplands to improve their suitability for San Joaquin kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and the Tipton kangaroo rat. Public use of Kern NWR consists of hunting, wildlife observation on a self-guided tour route and guided tours, and various interpretive programs. Public use of Pixley is limited to guided tours and limited interpretive programs.

Currently, the Service is not actively involved in habitat management of Blue Ridge NWR. This refuge is closed to public use.

Creating a Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The Service is preparing a new management plan, called a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for the Kern NWR Complex. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires the Service to prepare comprehensive conservation plans to guide the management of all current and future national wildlife refuges. The CCP will outline goals, objectives and management strategies for the three refuges in the Kern NWR Complex for a 15-year period.

The Service is preparing this plan for the following reasons:

- To ensure that management of the Kern NWR Complex reflects refuge purposes and the mission, policies and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- To provide Refuge visitors with an understanding of the reasons for management actions on the Refuge.

Planning Update 1

- To provide a vision statement for the Refuge.
- To ensure the compatibility of current and future uses of the Refuge
- To provide long-term continuity in Refuge management.
- To provide budget justification for operation and maintenance and facility development requests.

The CCP will be flexible. It will be reviewed periodically to ensure that its goals, objectives and implementation strategies and timetables are still appropriate.

The CCP will provide broad management direction and guidance for the refuges. The accompanying Environmental Assessment will describe the alternatives considered and their environmental effects. You will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan and Environmental Assessment.

A list of the key planning steps is included on this page. Currently, we are identifying issues and gathering data. This list will be included in future planning updates so you can track our progress through the planning process.

Planning Process

- ☒ Identify Public and Agency Issues
- ☒ Gather Data
- ☐ Develop Goals and Objectives
- ☐ Develop Management Strategies
- ☐ Evaluate Environmental Impacts
- ☐ Prepare Draft CCP/EA
- ☐ Public Review of Draft EA

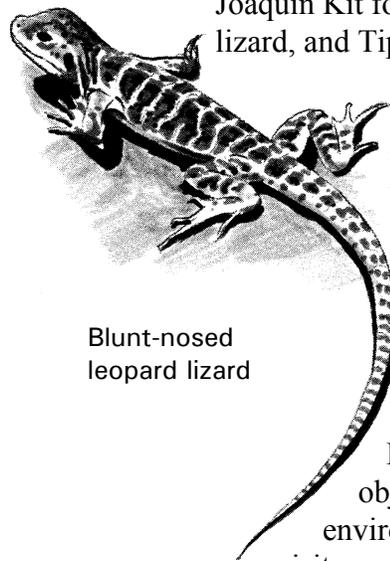
Interim Goals

In 1996, the refuge complex developed interim goals which have guided the management of each refuge. We will review these goals during the planning process to ensure they are still appropriate. The interim goals for each refuge are:

Kern NWR

1. Provide optimum wintering and migratory habitat for migratory birds, with an emphasis on waterfowl and waterbirds.

2. Preserve and restore native habitats to accomplish the recovery plan goals for the San Joaquin Kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and Tipton's kangaroo rat.



Blunt-nosed leopard lizard

3. Restore and maintain a native diversity of wildlife and their habitats.

4. Provide for wildlife-dependant public use activities which are compatible with the Refuge, Ecosystem, and Fish and Wildlife Service objectives, and encourage environmental understanding of visitors.

Pixley NWR

1. Preserve and restore native habitats in order to achieve the recovery goals for the San Joaquin kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, Tipton's kangaroo rat, and vernal pool fairy shrimp, as well as other endangered and sensitive species.

2. Restore and maintain a native diversity of wildlife and their habitats.

Planning Update 1

3. Provide optimum wintering and migratory habitat for migratory birds, with an emphasis on waterfowl and waterbirds.

Blue Ridge NWR

1. Provide essential foraging and roosting habitat for the California Condor in order to achieve the goals of the recovery plan.

2. Provide native diversity of habitats for other plant and animal species, including those listed as threatened or endangered.

Planning Issues

Planning issues are unresolved problems and opportunities which will be addressed in the CCP. We have identified the following issues to date:

- Water supply (Kern and Pixley)
- Water delivery system to Pixley NWR
- Control of exotic species such as salt cedar
- Availability of programs for non-consumptive recreationists (birders)
- Potential conflicts between non-consumptive and consumptive recreation (no tour route on hunt days)

How You Can Help

We would like to hear your comments, concerns, and ideas about the refuges. We are particularly interested in your comments on the interim goals and planning issues. Your input is critical to the success of this plan. The comment period closes September 30, 1999. You can either mail your comments to us or submit them in person at one of the public scoping meetings on August 30 in Tulare and August 31 in Bakersfield. These meetings will be a good opportunity for you to learn more about the refuges and the planning process.

You will also have an opportunity to review and comment on the Draft CCP and Environmental Assessment.

For More Information

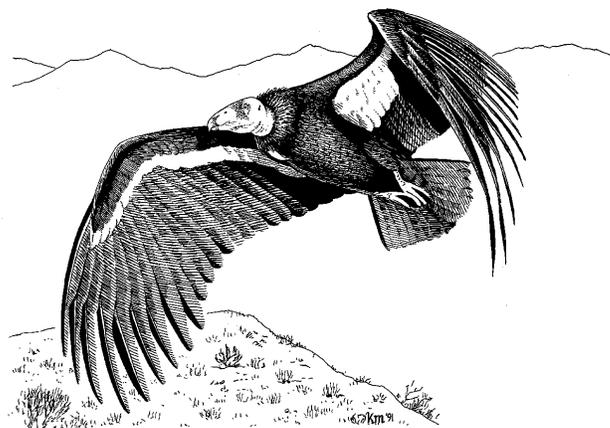
If you have questions, comments, or concerns, or would like information about the refuges or the planning process, please feel free to write or call us.

Information about the refuges

Dave Hardt, Refuge Manager
Kern NWR Complex
P.O. Box 670
Delano, CA 93216
(661) 725-2767
Email: dave_hardt@fws.gov

Information about the CCP

Mark Pelz, Refuge Planner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1916
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 414-6504
FAX (916) 414-6512
Email: mark_pelz@fws.gov



California condor

Your Invited to an Open House/ Public Meeting

You are invited to our first two open house/public meetings in Tulare and Bakersfield. These meetings will be a good opportunity for you to help us identify the issues to be addressed by the comprehensive conservation plan and comment on the interim goals for the refuges. We will be available to answer any questions you may have about the Kern NWR Complex and the CCP planning process. For more information, please contact Mr. Mark Pelz (address and phone number listed on page 5).

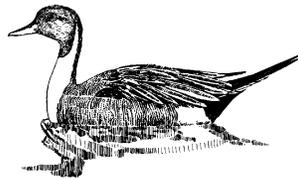
Tulare

Date: *Monday, August 30*

Time: *7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.*

Place: *Tulare Community Center
830 S. Blackstone*

*Take Blackstone exit off 99
Community Center is 2 blocks
south, next to fire station*



Bakersfield

Date: *Tuesday, August 31*

Time: *7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.*

Place: *Beale Library - Auditorium
701 Truxton Ave.*

*Take California Ave. exit off
Hwy 99, heading east
turn left on Chester, then
right on Truxton*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

California/Nevada Refuge Planning Office

2233 Watt Ave. Suite 230

Sacramento, CA 95825-0509

Address correction requested